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ABSTRACT

A simple, but useful, handout given to mothers of young children can greatly increase the likelihood that they will present aspects of emergent literacy in their homes. The concept of emergent literacy states that all literacy learning begins in infancy and proceeds forward from that point, and that all of the literacy skills of oral language, listening, reading, and writing are equally important and should receive equal emphasis in the home and in all early childhood programs. Although these activities should be especially useful with young "at-risk" children, they are equally useful with all young children. (A sample handout is attached which discusses ways to improve emergent literacy, including reading to the child, improving prior knowledge, beginning reading activities, some other important activities, things to avoid, concepts about print, environmental print, alphabet letter names, and writing activities.) (RS)

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Constructing a Handout to Use with Parents of Young "At-Risk" Children in Improving Emergent Literacy Skills

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CONSTRUCTING A HANDOUT TO USE WITH PARENTS OF YOUNG "AT-RISK" CHILDREN IN IMPROVING EMERGENT LITERACY SKILLS

A number of children entering kindergarten classrooms today could be classified as "at-risk" due to a lack of emergent literacy experiences in their homes. Since some children enter kindergarten having been exposed to as much as 1000 hours of informal emergent literacy activities in their homes, it is obvious that such children have a substantial head start over children who have been exposed to few emergent literacy activities. I believe that many parents of preschool children would attempt to provide some of the appropriate emergent literacy activities if they were given concrete help in knowing exactly what to do. Of course, such activities must be easily accessible and inexpensive to be practical for most parents. A number of the handouts and pamphlets which have been given in the past to parents of preschool children reflect elements of reading readiness rather than elements of contemporary emergent literacy.

The concept of emergent literacy is now widely accepted by contemporary early childhood educators. It is being considered much more commonly than in the past in planning and implementing day care, nursery school, and kindergarten programs. I believe that as the concept of emergent literacy becomes more widely known in the near future, it will be even much more common in early childhood literacy programs.

The concept of emergent literacy states that all literacy learning begins at infancy and proceeds forward from that point. It also states that all of the literacy skills of oral language, listening, reading, and writing are equally important and should receive equal emphasis in the home and in all early childhood programs. If the important elements of emergent literacy were stressed in the homes of all children and in all early childhood programs, these children then would enter first grade very well able to profit from beginning literacy programs especially those that emphasize whole language. As you may know, elementary whole language programs stress presenting all of the literacy skills in a holistic, meaningful manner. However, even if a child has a more traditional beginning reading program such as basal reader or phonic program, he or she would also be very ready to engage in this type of program.

This morning I will briefly discuss the most important elements of emergent literacy. These elements can very easily be presented both in homes and early childhood programs. I will then show you some model handouts that my undergraduate early childhood majors have constructed in class. Then we will divide into small groups and attempt to construct a simple handout which will describe the important aspects of emergent literacy. This type of handout then can be given to mothers of young children in various kinds of setting such as in hospitals to new mothers, at preschool screenings, at day care centers, and at nursery schools.

I sincerely believe that such a simple, but useful, handout can greatly increase the likelihood that mothers of young children will present aspects of emergent literacy in their home. Most of the activities which I will describe today are easy to do and are inexpensive. Although these activities should be especially useful with young "at risk" children, they are equally useful with all young children. In fact, a number of mothers are already doing many of these activities as a part of their daily routine without being aware of their importance in improving emergent literacy.

WAYS TO IMPROVE EMERGENT LITERACY

I. Reading to the Child

A. Read to the child on a regular basis beginning at infancy. This reading can be done by a parent, brother or sister, grandparent, any other family member, a day care provider, or any interested adult. The reading can be done from a wide variety of predictable books, picture storybooks, books of poetry, or any kind of appropriate children's materials. The same book can be read again and again to the child.

B. Help the child to predict the book content from the book title. Stop at various spots in the reading to have the child make predictions such as these:

> What do you think will happen next in this story?
> What do you want to happen next in this story?

C. Encourage the child to participate in the reading by talking about the pictures, reading along whenever possible, pointing to particular words, or making comments. Encourage the child to be an <u>active</u> participant in the reading.

D. Ask the child one or two <u>important</u> questions when you are finished reading the book.

E. Have the child try to briefly retell the book emphasizing aspects such as these:

> characters
> plot (theme)
> characters
> resolution

F. Have the child do a "reading reenactment" of a book which has been read to him or her. This is similar to pretend oral reading. The child often uses "book language" in a reading reenactment.

G. Take the child to the local library and help him or her to choose books which will later be read aloud.

H. Sometimes allow the child to select one of several books which have been provided to be read aloud to him or her. This gives the child some feeling of control.

II. Improving Prior Knowledge

A. Reading to the child on a regular basis from a wide variety of materials will greatly improve his or her prior knowledge. Good prior knowledge helps a child understand what he or she will later read.

B. Take the child to various places such as the zoo, a museum, the shopping mall, a grocery store, a carnival, or a picnic. Be sure to talk about what the child may see before he or she goes and discuss the trip afterward.

C. Encourage the child to watch educational television programs such as Sesame Street and Romper Room. If possible, sometimes watch the program with the child and discuss it with him or her.

C. Have other kinds of writing materials easily available such as pencils, markers, crayons, and various kinds of paper. Unlined paper is best for preschool children.

D. Use writing for real purposes such as writing grocery lists and notes and cards to family members and friends. Scribbling is acceptable writing at first.

E. Teach the child to correctly print his or her own first name: Anita

VII. Beginning Reading Activities

A. Motivate the child with a family trip, a cooking or baking activity, an art activity, or a construction activity. Have the child dictate or write (using scribbling, letter strings, or invented spelling) a story about the trip or activity. Help the child read the story back and make his or her own book. The child can later reread this book many times. He or she can learn many letter names and sight words in this way.

B. Read predictable books to the child. Encourage him or her to read along as much as possible. Fairly soon he or she probably can read an entire predictable book alone. Fingerpointing is fine -- this is called "one-to-one correspondence."

C. Encourage the child to read each predictable book and easy picture storybook over and over -- this is called reading to the "level of fluency."

D. Once in a while, the child can briefly retell the book which he or she has read.

E. One a while, the child can be asked one or two <u>important</u> questions about the book that he or she has read.

VIII. Some Other Important Activities

A. Encourage the child to use manipulatives such as blocks, legos, clay, playdough, markers, crayons, paints, and glue.

B. Have the child assemble jigsaw puzzles.

C. Listen to the child.

D. As much as possible answer the child's questions -- satisfy his or her curiosity.

E. Provide good nutrition and rest.

F. Encourage physical activities such as running, jumping, skipping and throwing and catching balls and beanbags.

G. Provide a good reading model -- let the child know that his or her family members value reading too.

H. Encourage the child to be independent, responsible, and cooperative.

IX. Things to Avoid

A. Don't pressure the child to do activities that he or she doesn't seem ready to do -- this can be very harmful.

B. Don't teach the child phonics (letter sounds) in isolation.

C. Don't let the child watch too much television or play too many computer games.

III. Concepts About Print

A. Show the child the title (name) of a book that is going to be read to him or her and discuss with the child the purpose of a book title.

B. Show the child the author of a book that is going to be read to him or her and discuss with the child what the author of a book does.

C. Show the child the illustrator of a book that is going to be read to him or her and discuss what the illustrator of a book does.

D. Have the child indicate the pictures and the print on a book page.

E. Have the child indicate how to correctly turn the pages of a book.

F. Have the child indicate on what part of a book page to begin reading.

G. Have the child indicate on what part of a book page to stop reading.

H. Have the child indicate the front and back of a book.

I. Have the child point to any letter on a book page.

J. Have the child point to any word on a book page.

K. Have the child point to any period or comma on a book page.

IV. Environmental Print

A. Answer the child's questions about letters, words, and numbers.

B. Teach the child such environmental print as STOP, McDonald's, Walmart, K-Mart, can labels, and cereal labels by sight.

V. Alphabet Letter Names

A. Have the child play with alphabet blocks.

B. Read an alphabet book with the child. There also are a number of different storybooks for most letters of the alphabet.

C. Teach the child the letter names in his or her own first name.

D. Teach all of the capital and lower-case letter names by association.

A "This is a capital A."
a "This is a lower-case a."

E. If the child seems to have great difficulty in remembering an important letter name, use tactile (touch) strategies such as instant pudding, clay, playdough, a sand or salt tray, or magnetic letters.

VI. Writing Activities

A. Encourage the child to scribble, draw pictures, use letter strings (random letters), and invented spelling while writing.

B. Have chalk and a chalkboard available.